



## The Roach

*by Robert Roach*

He moved through his environment with the stealth and prowess of a jungle cat. The fluid, strong strides and gestures made him seem more like a shadow than flesh and blood.

He wore a trench coat that draped about his form and accentuated the angles of his body. The coat, which seemed more like a cloak, made him look like a caricature. An awe-inspiring caricature.

He stepped along the ghetto's garbage wearing black patent leather button-up shoes. The cigarette he smoked wasn't a link in the chain of a bad habit. It was more for his image—his mystique—in the neighborhood. For it was hard for a white man to gain respect on Chicago's South Side, even during the Depression.

He peered up and down the street out of the cloth mask that partially concealed his features. "A poor man's Zorro" would have been an apt description of his disguise. The coal gray fedora with its black band sat poised on his brow at the correct angle for the proper effect. It shaded his eyes and face. The hat, the mask, the trench coat, and the meticulously clean and well-

fitting deep blue, three piece pin-stripe suit he wore were appropriate for the lean, smooth-muscled man.

He exhaled the acrid smoke. It billowed before his cold, taut face. The man had high cheek bones which angled sharply toward his thin, but expressive, lips. His slender nose set off his hard, gray eyes. His face and form were handsome, but his expression and demeanor were uncompromising.

He watched a certain door to a certain house with extreme intensity. As he stood in the shadows with only the glow from his cigarette to hint of his presence, a young junkie-thief named Rollo bumped into him. The black turned toward the man with a stinging epithet on the tip of his tongue. The black's words froze in his throat as he recognized the man. With a mumbled exclamation, the junkie-thief beat an extremely hasty retreat.

He saw the sign he was waiting for. A simple matter of a light switching on and off quickly. The man was instant action. As he ran, it seemed as if his feet scarcely touched the ground. A grim smile haunted his expression as he rushed toward an encounter with death. Whether death or he would get the better of this meeting he did not know. And that's what made him smile.

He took the stairs four at a time. Each wooden plank groaned as he planted his foot on it. He didn't even bother with the rickety banister for he doubted that it could withstand a child's weight.

He slowed as he reached the third floor of the tenement house. Whereas before his speed betrayed his passing, he now moved swiftly but in total silence. The strong scent, a mixture of human stench, smoke and excrement, assailed his nostrils. But out of the smell he caught the trace of expensive cologne. This he followed to the room 3B.

He paused at the door to listen. His acute hearing distinguished the voices within. It was who he wanted. Wasting no more time, he kicked in the door, simultaneously drawing his gigantic, handcrafted gun.

He stood in the doorway, allowing the significance of his presence to sink in. The men in the room simply stared at him—in hate and in awe.

"The Roach!" one of them gasped. The others went for their weapons.

He smiled as a cold wind whipped through the dilapidated building. Shots rang out, shaking the structure and waking its inhabitants. Five minutes passed and order had returned.

He walked out the front of the building and lit a cigarette. Many of the neighborhood's denizens, both predators and victims, watched the Roach as he walked away from the deteriorating facade. Some of them watched thankfully, others watched spitefully.

He melted into the darkness and became one with the shadows.

## Deceptive Destination

*by Debbi Schimpf*

Spheres, big and small with a mixture of hues;  
 Transparent blues splashed with clear emeralds,  
 Silvery pinks intermingled with lucid yellows;  
 Riding on a gentle breeze with an unknown destination.  
 They float and drop and float again higher  
 Surveying the earth from their own unique angles.  
 But fate has a way of creeping in  
 And just as one is about to take a rest from its sky ride  
 It bursts on a blade of grass.